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FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
Electronic Communication

Title: (U) Request to open a full investigation
into an alleged murder-for-hire scheme

Date: 09/09/2021

From: ALBANY

AL-5 VCMO/OC/TOC/SWB/PLRA

Contact: Brian M. DeCarr

Approved By: SSA Michael E. Dwyer

Drafted By: Brian M. DeCarr

Case ID #: 166C-AL-3491673 (U) Christopher Pence (subject); Christina Cordero (victim); Francisco Cordero (victim); Murder-for-hire

CONFIDENTIAL HUMAN SOURCE INFORMATION

Information contained in this document pertains to the identity of a confidential human source (CHS). Disclosure of a CHS's identity, including the dissemination of information received from or regarding the CHS that tends to identify him or her, may be approved only when it is legally required or absolutely necessary to achieve important investigative, public policy, or safety objectives. Approval of the SAC from the office where the CHS is assigned is required to disclose the identity of a CHS, unless: 1) FBI personnel disclose the CHS's identity to another FBI employee who, in the performance of his or her official duties, has a duty to know this information; 2) FBI personnel disclose the CHS's identity to the DOJ when a CHS has been called to testify in a grand jury or judicial proceeding; or 3) FBI personnel are required to disclose the identity by court order, law, regulation, the AGG-CHS, or other DOJ policies.

Synopsis: (U) Request authority to initiate a full investigation into an alleged murder-for-hire scheme set to take place in the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Albany Division's area of responsibility.

Enclosure(s): Enclosed are the following items:

1. (U) Conversations and financial transactions scraped from dark web murder-for-hire market
2. (U) National Cyber Investigative Task Force (NCIJTF) Graph
3. (U) Emails with the National Cyber Investigative Task Force (NCIJTF)

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4. (U) Coinbase graph
5. (U) Coinbase graph (zoomed in)
6. (U) Coinbase communications

Details:

SSA authority is requested to initiate the captioned investigation involving a murder-for-hire scheme.

The following information regarding the captioned murder-for-hire scheme is known at this time:

1) Case predication:

On Thursday, September 2, 2021, information was received from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Knoxville Division regarding a murder-for-hire. FBI Knoxville Special Agent Clay Anderson has a Confidential Human Source (CHS) that provided credible and reliable information that two people, Christina Cordero, date of birth [REDACTED], and Francisco Cordero, date of birth [REDACTED], currently living in Hoosick Falls, New York are the targets of a murder for hire scheme.

The CHS provided information from a sub-source who can scrape certain dark web market sites that pertain to murder-for-hire. At this time, it is believed that the sites are scams, and that no real hitmen are being dispatched to carry out hits. The CHS previously reported similar information regarding different murder-for-hire schemes which was disseminated to the appropriate FBI field office for further investigation. The intelligence provided by the CHS in those cases led to the arrest of multiple subjects correctly identified as the subjects that placed the hit.

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The information provided by the CHS for the murder-for-hire investigation being conducted by FBI Albany was analyzed by the FBI National Cyber Investigative Joint Task Force (NCIJTF), and as a result, a Coinbase account was identified as the account used to make the cryptocurrency payment ordering the hits on Christina Cordero and Francisco Cordero. An exigent request was submitted to Coinbase. The returns showed the Coinbase account belonged to Christopher Pence, date of birth [REDACTED], of Utah, United States.

On Friday, September 3, 2021, FBI Albany Special Agents Brian DeCarr and Patrick Lydon interviewed the potential victims, Christina Cordero and Francisco Cordero. The interviews corroborated the information received from FBI Knoxville and from the investigative work done by FBI Albany prior to conducting the interviews. Additionally, the interviews revealed a motive for Pence.

2) Identify pertinent background and significance of subject(s) being targeted:

The subject has no known pertinent background or significance.

3) Identify pertinent background information on each known subject:

The subject has no known pertinent background information.

4) Identify type of violations committed:

Title 18 U.S Code 1958 - Use of interstate commerce facilities in the commission of murder-for-hire.

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5) Identify assisting agencies, if a joint investigation:

At this time, there are no assisting agencies.

6) Description of the investigative plan and objectives for the next 180 days:

The FBI Albany Division conducted baseline checks on the subject, victims, and relevant associates to the subject for the purposes of gathering intelligence, identifying links, and corroborating or verifying the information and evidence obtained through the course of the investigation.

Interviews with the victims were completed. Continued communication or follow up interviews with the victims will be done when appropriate.

FBI Albany will identify and subpoena financial records for the subject in an effort to further link payments made for the hits purchased on the dark web to the subject.

An undercover employee will be utilized to make contact with the subject posing as a hitman that has taken the job requested by the subject in order for the FBI to further gather evidence.

Collaboration with the FBI Salt Lake City Division as well the appropriate Resident Agency, St. George, will be done to coordinate surveillance on the subject where and when applicable.

FBI Albany will work closely with the United State Attorney's Office in the Northern District of New York to determine the progress and directionality of the case with a goal to conduct an arrest operation

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which will likely include the execution of search warrants.

7) Describe sensitive circumstances, if any:

There are currently no known sensitive circumstances.

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